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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [UY](#)
SUBJECT: VERY LITTLE ANTI-SEMITISM IN URUGUAY, BUT NEED FOR
EDUCATION

Classified By: Ambassador Frank E. Baxter
for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

1. (U) Special Envoy to Combat and Monitor Anti-Semitism Gregg Rickman and Karen Paikin visited Uruguay July 6-7, and found few overt manifestations of anti-Semitism in the country. The visit included meetings with Jewish community members including Montevideo Mayor Ricardo Ehrlich, and with the Honorary Commission Against Racism, Xenophobia, and all forms of Discrimination. The Jewish Community reported feeling generally free from discrimination, but stated concerns of increased Iranian presence, declining quality of education, and decreasing Jewish population due to low birthrates and migration. END SUMMARY.

Strong Jewish Community

2. (U) The Special Envoy met with representatives from B'nai B'rith in Uruguay, the Uruguayan Central Committee for Israel, and other members of the Jewish Community. These interlocutors reported that there are many Jewish leaders in the government and that they have enjoyed support from current and past governments. They noted no specific instances of anti-Semitism, but pointed out that the media in Uruguay is generally critical of Israeli policy. One grievance is that negative comments slip into the local press because international wire reports are used verbatim without modifying for tone or content. Additionally, the Jewish Community is concerned that the declining economic situation could lead to more anti-Semitism as disenfranchised people look for scapegoats.

Holocaust Education Controversial

3. (SBU) The Ministry of Education's Director of Human Rights, Maria Elena Martinez, included Holocaust education under the umbrella of human rights education and mentioned it is not part of the required curriculum. She also said that there is limited education on slavery and genocide, including that related to Uruguay's own African and indigenous descendants. The GOU is currently reforming its education system, and strong political disagreements over how to address the human rights abuses during the military dictatorship and by insurgent guerillas are blocking much needed changes. The Special Envoy stated a commitment to pursue the participation of Uruguay in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, in order to facilitate Holocaust education in the country.

14. (U) Despite being left out of the official curriculum, there is significant informal Holocaust education including a recent two-month exhibit attended by 35,000 people, 10,000 of whom were high school students. The exhibit was a private initiative but was housed at Montevideo's City Hall and received significant public support. Additionally, the Holocaust Memorial, prominently located in the city, was first of its kind in South America. During the visit to the Holocaust Memorial, however, the Special Envoy was disappointed to see it has fallen into disrepair and suffered the same effects of vandalism as many other parts of the city. Note: Although we are aware of one occurrence of anti-Semitic vandalism on the Memorial in the past, currently, there is no evidence that the vandalism is motivated by anti-Semitism. END NOTE. When discussed with Mayor Ehrlich, the mayor expressed disappointment and promised to visit the site.

Concern about Iranian-Uruguayan Relationship

15. (SBU) Before his arrival, Special Envoy Rickman was aware of the Jewish Community's concern about the seemingly growing presence of Iran in the region. With the recent conviction of Iranian nationals involved in the 2002 and 2004 bombings of the Jewish Community Center and the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, the Jewish Community in Montevideo is acutely conscious of the new Iranian Ambassador's visibility. Iran is actively pursuing increased economic and political relations with Uruguay and other countries in the region.

16. (SBU) Nevertheless, the interlocutors from the Jewish community generally believe that the relationship is based on trade and that Uruguay is not ideologically vulnerable to Iranian influence. Only unfounded mentions were made to suggest that Iran was funding anti-Israeli press and student groups.

Comment

17. (C) Overall, the Jewish Community members seemed more concerned with the general economic situation in Uruguay than with discrimination. The decline of the education system was noted by all. The lack of human rights education, including education on the Holocaust, underscored that deficiencies exist. Given the sensitivity of education system reform, it would be difficult and likely counterproductive for the USG to suggest changes. Involving Uruguay in the Task Force for International Cooperation for Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, as recommended by the Special Envoy, would be a positive step forward. END COMMENT.

18. (U) S/E Gregg Rickman cleared this message.

Baxter